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AUTHOR Lanese, James F.
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ABSTRACT

Since the inception of the Cleveland (Ohio) Scholarship and Tutoring Grant Program in 1996, much attention has focused on the program and its progress. A number of studies have been conducted of the implementation and early outcomes of the initiative. Of particular interest are the following: (1) the Program on Education Policy and Governance Report, a survey of nearly 200 parents; (2) the American Federation of Teachers report, a study of the first year of implementation; (3) the Public Policy Forum report, an interview study of about 270 parents, teachers, and administrators; and (4) reports from Indiana University on various aspects of the program. In general, voucher participants do not seem to have demonstrated achievement gains (as a result of attending private school) greater than their public school counterparts. Parent satisfaction and selection reasons tend to explain each other. Parents of public and private school students also tend to pay more attention to nonachievement factors in what they look for in a school. Overall, the voucher program does not seem to have clear impacts on academic achievement. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)

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Cleveland Public Schools

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James F. Lanese

A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
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April 7, 1999

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Introduction

Since the initiation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Grant Program (CSTGP) during the summer of 1996, much nationwide attention has been focused upon the program and its progress. To date, the following chronology highlights the past thirty months of the choice school program in the Cleveland, Ohio.

1995: The "Ohio Pilot Scholarship Program" was included in the Ohio State budget specifying that nearly 2,000 primary grade children in the Cleveland City School District could be chosen to receive scholarships to attend private and/or religious schools within the district.

June, 1996: Franklin County Common Pleas Court declared the "pilot voucher program" constitutional following a legal challenge by program opponents including the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and other agencies.

Fall, 1996: About 2,000 students in grades kindergarten through three were selected to receive scholarships and attended "choice" schools.

May, 1997: The Tenth District Court of Appeals overturned the previous ruling and declared that the program was unconstitutional. However, the State of Ohio sought to continue the program pending a further appeal to the Ohio Supreme Court. The first year of choice school participation was completed by nearly 2,000 students.

June, 1997: A news release by Ohio governor George Voinovich and David Brennan (founder of HOPE Academy, one of the "voucher" schools) cites the fall-to-spring performance gains of students in these schools.

July, 1997: The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) released its study of the "Cleveland Voucher Program: Who Chooses, Who's Chosen, Who Pays?" by Dan Murphy, F. Howard Nelson, and Bella Rosenburg. This report examined the first year implementation of the plan, addressed who applied for vouchers, who used them, what schools they attended, and what was the cost of the program.

August, 1997: A second cohort of voucher participants began the new academic year. Participation levels increased slightly under the formulated program expansion for the 1997-98 school year. Approximately 1000 additional students were enrolled under the program.

September, 1997: The Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) released its report "An Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program" by Jay Greene, William Howell, and Paul Peterson. This report included the HOPE school test score analysis (cited in the June news release) and the results of a parent survey conducted by the University of Northern Illinois. Voucher applicants were surveyed concerning their attitudes towards school and the voucher program.

November, 1997: The Public Policy Forum (PPF) released its report: "School Choice in Cleveland and Milwaukee: What parents Look For" by Emily Van Dunk. This survey analysis represented the initial phase of an effort to focus on the views of parents, teachers, and administrators on one aspect of accountability: what parents look for in a school.

November, 1997: The Junior Achievement Evaluation Project (later called the Indiana Center for Evaluation, Indiana University) forwarded its first year (1996-97) project evaluation report. The report was the formal program evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship (voucher) Program contracted under the law by the Ohio State Department of Education. "A Comparative Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Grant Program" by Kim Metcalf, William Boone, Frances Stage, Todd Chilton, and Patty Muller specifically addressed two questions: what are the program effects on student achievement and, what are the characteristics of participants and their families and how do they compare to those of the non-participants? The report was publicly released in March, 1998 after a delay by the contracting agency (the Ohio Department of Education).

February, 1998: The Public Policy Forum released the second phase of its report, "Choice School Accountability: A Consensus of Views in Ohio and Wisconsin" by Emily Van Dunk. The study cited and recommended what information, prepared by whom, and what compliance methods, should guide private school reporting for accountability to the public.

April - August, 1998: Public debate (sensationalized in the media) ensued involving the HOPE school supporters/researchers, the American Federation of Teachers (Cleveland Teachers Union), and the IU evaluators concerning aspects of their respective studies.

Summer, 1998: Awards of the third round of vouchers were completed for the the 1998-99 school year. About 1300 new voucher recipients were enrolled in private schools. The current school year finds a total of 3,744 voucher recipients (from all three years) enrolled in the program utilizing voucher funding. 3,030 students are enrolled in religious schools, 713 are attending non-sectarian schools.

November, 1998: The Indiana Center for Evaluation released its "Second-Year Report: Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program" for the 1997-98 school year. This research effort sought to answer the following questions:

1. Are there differences between students who returned to the scholarship program during their fourth grade year and those who did not return after their third grade year?

2. Are there differences between fourth grade scholarship and public school students with regard to demographic and background characteristics of preprogram achievement?

3. Are there differences in classroom relevant variables (i.e., class size, teachers' education level, and teachers' experience) between scholarship classes and public school classes?

4. What are the effects of the scholarship program on students' academic achievement after two years in the program and when other relevant variables are controlled?

Each of these reports and events were completed under the auspices of different agencies; the highlighted findings that follow may reflect politically inspired perspectives contained in the conclusions which are cited.

The Studies: Findings, Conclusions, Observations, Questions, and Issues

In general the studies mentioned above investigated three aspects of the voucher program's first three years of operation: program implementation methods and participants, parental attitudes towards the opportunity and program, and achievement progress of the participants and their non-participant counterparts. The following discussion includes highlights of the studies with comments and issues pertaining to the studies.

The Program on Educational Policy and Governance Report

The PEPG Report summarized survey responses from parent interviews conducted by PEPG staff and by the staff of Northern Illinois University. In all, nearly 200 interviews were conducted among voucher recipients and those who did not enroll in the program. Also, student achievement results from one voucher school (HOPE Academy) was reported. Among the highlighted findings were:

1. Parents of scholarship recipients who previously attended public schools were much more satisfied with every aspect of their choice school than applicants who did not receive a scholarship, but attended public schools instead.

2. Choice schools did well at retaining students in the program.

3. Non-participant parents cited transportation, financial factors, and admission to a preferred public school most frequently as reasons for not accepting a voucher.

4. Reasons for applying for a voucher school assignment were: academic quality, greater safety, location, religion, and friends among public school recipients.

5. The average family income of voucher recipients from public schools was less than that of non-recipients who remained in public schools.

6. The survey data was limited; due to the respondent identification process, voucher recipients could be reached more easily and share information more readily than non-recipients.

7. Test score results in mathematics and reading show large gains for CSTGP students attending the two schools (HOPE)

established in response to the creation of the CSTGP.

8. In sum, both parental survey and initial test score results provide strong justification for the legislative decision to continue the program.

Questions and Issues: The PEPG Report.

The survey results are suspect by the authors' own admission (see statement #6 above). Participants would be likely to respond positively about their experience having been selected to receive a voucher.

The report indicates that the students in the HOPE schools were administered the CAT test in the fall and spring of the 1996-97 school year. The version, form, and level of the test are not specified, as well as how the test was scored (using fall and spring norms?) to assess the gain.

Also, it is interesting that the results used for reporting are indicated as average Percentile Rank scores which are subsequently added/subtracted to report a gain score for HOPE students. Percentile rank scores are rank order scores and are not suitable for arithmetic operations. If, indeed, the "average percentile ranks" were accurately derived from scaled score averages, they may only be assessed for gains by utilizing an NCE (normal curve equivalent) score. For example, converting the reported results on Table 4.2 (page 87 of the report) to NCE scores and analyzing the gains in reading, language, mathematics, and mathematical concepts would yield gains of 3.4, -2.5, 6.6, and 7.3 points respectively (versus those posted "PR" gains). To put this in context, the last time Chapter I/Title I students in the Cleveland Schools were assessed using a fall to spring pre-post model, targeted gains were expected to be 7 NCE's or greater. Seven NCE units was the normal anticipated outcome for progress in reading and mathematics for students provided with compensatory services (which are much like those students that the author describes as the HOPE attendees). None of the gains reported reach the seven NCE level, which indicates that normal progress throughout the course of an academic year was evident among HOPE students, but not large gains.

In the text of the report (pages 40 - 42) the authors refer to one to two percentile point decline in reading scores among district students. Interestingly, the district does not report percentile scores in its bulletins or profiles. All scores are reported in NCE units.

The authors are likely referring to the following information available from Test Bulletin #1 concerning the spring, 1996 reading achievement results (from the California Achievement Test, Form E).

Cleveland Public Schools
Spring Reading Achievement

GRADE	1995 NCE	1996 NCE	Corresponding Percentiles (not reported in TB#1)	
1	49.6	47.8	49.8	48.8
2	46.1	44.8	49.9	49.4
3	48.8	47.5	49.4	48.7

A quick review of the chart indicates declines in performance among students from 1995 to 1996; however, reading the chart diagonally (grade one to two to three) indicates a decline in reading scores between first and second grade but an increase in performance from second to third grade. Note the corresponding percentile rank scores at this level tell a different story; this illustrates the reason why percentile rank scores cannot be used to analyze performance gains. Notably, despite the inconsistencies between the two metrics, gains or declines were all less than one point, not between one and two percentile points as noted by the PEPG authors.

Finally, information exchanged with the Junior Achievement Evaluation Project (Center for Evaluation, Indiana University) has been combined with achievement test results available earlier (1996) for students who subsequently enrolled in voucher schools. The file contains 749 records of students who were in the second grade in the district in 1996. The reading scores of those students indicated a 46.3 NCE average for the reading comprehension subtest among all voucher participants. The 46 students within this group who enrolled in the HOPE schools posted a 45.2 NCE average. During that year, all Cleveland second graders (including these 749 students) averaged 44.8 NCE's on the same subtest. While HOPE schools received students with slightly lower reading achievement scores than other voucher participants, the entire population of 1997 third grade voucher participants averaged higher scores than their district counterparts as second graders.

Additional debate about differing research results ensued during 1998. See the discussion below concerning other technical issues.

The American Federation of Teachers Report

The AFT Report investigated the implementation of the first year of voucher awards. The authors concluded:

> 1. The voucher program did not appreciably increase the educational choices available to parents of students of "failing" public schools including an analysis of those who participated, those who did not, and the participation in tutoring grants within the school district.
>
> 2. About one-half of the public school students who were eligible for a voucher did not enroll in private schools.
>
> 3. Voucher students who were previously enrolled in private

schools received preferred placement; nearly half of the voucher students from public schools were enrolled in newly formed schools.

4. The public cost of the voucher program is greater than believed; moreover, the program was mostly paid for out of state aid designated for the Cleveland Public Schools.

5. Taxpayers spent $1.6 million to fund vouchers for 496 students who were already enrolled in private schools and remained in them.

6. Taxpayers spent another $1.7 million to fund vouchers for 525 former public school students to enroll in four new schools with no educational or financial track record.

7. In the more established private schools, the total public cost per voucher far exceeded the amount of money actually being spent on new voucher students.

Issues and questions for the AFT Report

The specific data utilized by the AFT was provided by the CSTP office (enrollment information), the Cleveland City School District (financial information), and was derived from the text of the law which created the program. The ensuing analysis addressed issues inherent in the intent of the law: to fund a small number (about 2,000) of low income students at private schools and to enable an equal number of Cleveland Public Schools students to receive tutoring grants. The conclusions noted above addressed the designed inquiry.

The results are noteworthy, especially when taken in context with the other studies reported here. A realization of the actual participation patterns and characteristics of the participants provides an interesting perspective for review of the other studies noted.

The Public Policy Forum Report

The Forum Report, Phase One, sought to determine what mattered to parents when choosing a school for their child. About 270 parents, teachers, and administrators were interviewed to provide information for these conclusions:

1. Information about a school's program (i.e. curriculum and instruction) is the most common piece of information parents want when deciding upon a school for their child.

2. Information about teachers is next.

3. Other criteria in order of preference: school characteristics (class size and student body composition), general student outcomes (life skills and promotions rates), safety and discipline, standardized test scores, level of parent involvement, and school reputation.

4. Teachers and administrators concur with parents (i.e. finding #1).

5. There is essential agreement among parents, across public and private schools, on the criteria that are important to them in selecting a school.

The Forum Report, Phase Two extended the discussion of what parents want to know about their children' schools. Having identified what information is most desirable, this phase of the research sought to identify specifics of what information to report, who should compile and report this information, and how reporting should be monitored and enforced. The following conclusions were reported in phase two.

1. Choice schools should publicly report mission; philosophy; governing structure; curriculum and teacher methods; the qualifications of teachers and administrators; pupil achievement on standardized tests; how money is budgeted and spent; and the attendance, graduation, and suspension rates.

2. A public board with representatives of private choice schools and public schools should be created to gather and report the required information for the public.

3. Choice schools will comply with a one year probationary period; further non-compliance should result in loss of public funds.

Issues and Questions for the Forum Reports

These reports are unique to the others in two ways. The information gathered for the study was derived from both Cleveland, Ohio and Milwaukee, Wisconsin where school choice programs are in effect. Also, the methodology employed by the researchers utilized open-ended, non-structured interview strategies, thereby eliciting responses which were not prompted. The results, therefore, become interesting from the point of view that no artificial dichotomies were imposed upon the respondents.

Responses concerning the reasons for the school selection do reinforce, to some degree, findings cited in the PEPG Report above (i.e. school program and safety).

Further, the findings and recommendations of phase two add a practical dimension to the issues. Should these programs, and others, remain in operation, accountability measures should require schools to conform to those measures imposed upon existing private and public schools.

The Indiana University Reports

The IU Report (Year One) of voucher participant versus non-participants provides the most comprehensive examination of student achievement patterns completed to date. Among the observations:

1. Scholarship students who previously attended a Cleveland public school were achieving at slightly higher levels before they entered the program than students who remained in CPS, however there are no significant differences between these groups of students in eligibility for free lunch, gender, race, or parental living arrangements.

2. After eight months in the program, there appear to be no statistically significant differences in the adjusted third grade achievement between scholarship and non-scholarship public school students when background and demographic factors are included in the analysis.

3. The results suggest that the scholarship program does not draw Cleveland's "best" students; scholarship participants look very much like their non-participant peers in many ways.

4. Early results indicate that the first year of the scholarship program led neither to significantly greater nor lower achievement for students who participated.

The report concludes with a discussion concerning the limitations of the study at hand and of the issues and problems present which might impact the findings, as well as recommendations for future evaluation plans. All in all, this study is the most comprehensive of those cited so far; methodologically speaking, it provides the best analysis of the student achievement among participant and non-participant control group students.

Issues and Questions for the IU Report

The analysis included a report of third grade achievement data contributed by the HOPE schools along with district-contributed grade two data for a limited number of students. The data was not integrated with other program and non-participant data since the test forms and testing conditions varied for the HOPE students. Conclusions were not drawn concerning the HOPE voucher participants; results were reported in parallel where they could be discussed.

Debated Issues: Student achievement among participant and non-participant students.

Shortly after the formal release of the IU evaluation report, reactions and challenges filled the media; in particular, Paul Peterson and Jay Greene (PEPG) questioned the methodology and analyses techniques utilized by the Indiana team. Specifically, they questioned the interim analytical techniques, the "legitimacy" of the comparison (CPS non-participants) group, and the reliability of second grade scores (of all study participant) used in the analysis.

PEPG took its challenges to the editorial pages of the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, and Education Week to raise these technical issues. In response, the IU evaluation team conducted additional analyses and provided the following results.

First, in response to the criticism of analytical methodology, the IU team re-analyzed the data from the first year evaluation utilizing the multiple regression techniques suggested by the PEPG team. Results of this re-analysis provided identical results as the ANCOVA's performed initially: the scholarship program status was not statistically significant in predicting any of the third grade scores; the level of significance was identical for both ANCOVA and sequential regression.

Secondly, an analysis to compare characteristics of the Cleveland Schools used in the study (n=28) versus those not included (n=34) found no significant differences between schools included versus those not included. Again, MANOVA determined these results when characteristics of prior test scores (NCE), enrollment levels, race and gender composition (students and staff), student mobility, attendance, poverty rates, and teacher/student ratios were included in the analysis. PEPG's claim of non-comparability of control group schools was dispelled.

Finally, PEPG claimed in all of its editorial letters that the Cleveland Public Schools' second grade test scores were implausible (that they were higher than the previous year) and were not independently proctored. "Clearly, PEPG says, the second grade scores used by IU as a benchmark were inflated". The Indiana team again responded with a review of the test's documentation which indicated that second grade test scores were not unreliable based upon the second to third grade achievement score correlations attained in the study. Also, additional information is presented below from analyses of the district achievement data.

Additional Pertinent Information and Data

During the course of providing requested information from the Cleveland School District files to the various agencies, several summaries and comparative data analyses were completed within the district concerning the samples utilized by the evaluators. The following descriptive data is worth noting.

1996 Grade 2 California Achievement Test Results
1995-96 Academic Year

Population	Vocabulary Mean NCE	Comprehension Mean NCE	N
Voucher St's	51.5	46.4	699
HOPE Students	48.8	45.2	46
All CPS St's	48.9	44.8	5907

This information reinforces the IU observation that those voucher students who enrolled at the HOPE schools are slightly lower achieving students than the entire voucher population. It also provides an interesting piece of information not reported in either study which addressed the HOPE student population.

Notwithstanding the issues cited above (with the PEPG report),

this summary of the 46 HOPE students with available data from their second grade year in Cleveland indicates a 45.2 NCE average for reading comprehension as second graders on the California Achievement Test, Form E. The IU report cites a third grade achievement level among 36 HOPE students at 40.9 NCE's, a greater than four point decline since their second grade year. Despite the fact that these are NOT matched scores, the same logic concerning the "normal progress" concept underlying the NCE score would indicate a zero (0.0) NCE change from one year to the next on the same achievement battery. This fact does refute the claims of large achievement gains made in the PEPG report.

Finally, to address a discussion among the authors of the PEPG and IU reports concerning the stability of the district's second grade CAT scores over time, the following analysis was compiled.

Grade 2 California Achievement Reading Test Scores
Cleveland Public Schools Students
Standardization Sample

Year	N	Vocabulary Mean NCE	(sd)	Comprehension Mean NCE	(sd)	
1997	5907	48.9	(24.3)	44.8	(20.2)	CPS
1996	5593	51.8	(24.0)	46.1	(19.5)	CPS
1995	5452	55.0	(23.6)	48.1	(19.7)	CPS
1986	20642	45.0	(23.0)	45.0	(21.0)	STD*

*includes urban student participants with identical results

A review of this chart indicates a declining achievement level among second graders over the past three years. However, a review of the standard deviation values illustrates a very consistent pattern over the three years of CPS data as well as with the original standardization data published by CTB-McGraw Hill, the test publisher. This does indicate a stable distribution about the mean of the tested population over three sampled years and points to the reliability of this instrument.

IU Evaluation Report: Year Two (1997-98) extended the analysis of student characteristics and achievement during the second year of voucher program operation. Notably, this study included an analysis of HOPE school students who were included in the program achievement testing. The findings from year two:

1. Returning and non-returning program students do not differ significantly on any background or demographic,factors, or preprogram achievement measures. However, students who remained at voucher schools achieved significantly higher scores in reading, science, and social studies than those who did not remain after the third grade.

2. Program participants and their public school counterparts

are remarkably similar in terms of background demographic characteristics (gender, race, and poverty) and previous achievement (unlike year one).

3. The classrooms of participant and non-participants differed significantly; class sizes (smaller in public schools), teacher advanced training (more in public schools), and teacher experience (greater in public schools).

4. When demographic, classroom, and prior achievement factors are controlled, significant differences are evident with higher voucher student achievement in language, however, no significant differences are evident in reading, science, mathematics, and social studies. Further, however, it was found that HOPE students achieved significantly lower on all measures (subjects) of fourth grade performance than their public (non-participant) and other private (voucher) counterparts.

The second year study, while responding to more detailed evaluation questions, reinforces the first year results. Participants and non-participants share similar background demographic characteristics; their settings (school environments) vary significantly; but their achievement does not (except in language and with selected grouping analyses). As the authors conclude, only additional study over time will determine any significant or long term effects of choice school placements.

Conclusions

Several studies of the Cleveland voucher experience focused upon varied aspects of the program. Parent satisfaction levels were assessed, school choice opinions were gathered, student selection and participation patterns were documented, and finally, student achievement was analyzed. At this point, the following statements can be made.

1. In general, it does not appear that voucher participants demonstrate achievement gains (as a result of attending a private school) any greater than their public school counterparts. Significant differences were not found to exist when acknowledging background factors of students in the study except higher language achievement among program participants than public school students during year two.

2. Satisfaction and selection reasons (from two different studies) appear to explain each other. When parents are provided a choice and accept it, they tend to be satisfied with that choice. Those who did not accept the option were less likely inclined to respond to the survey; those who had no choice in the first place would likely be less satisfied not having been given the option.

3. Parents of public and private school students alike, appear to pay more attention to non-achievement school factors when asked what they look for in a school and how they should obtain information. While achievement information is specified, several other factors are considered a higher priority.

It appears, after two years of evaluation and debate, that academic achievement is not clearly impacted (positively or negatively) by participation in a voucher program. Several factors impact the experience and satisfaction of students and parents in a school setting. As Cecilia Rouse has reported, "not all public schools are created equal; additionally, not all private schools are created equal" following her analysis of several regular, choice, and magnet schools in Milwaukee. A specific program's value appears to be in the satisfaction of choice among participants and non-participants alike. When one is "comfortable" with a situation or circumstance, one is likely to function and perform without distraction.

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